

When We Play at Kingmaking 15

Mr. Homer Bigart, New York Times correspondent, today on the page opposite this one relates two interesting factors concerned with the present troubles in Viet Nam. One shows us to have played kingmaker and the other shows us to have tried to manage the news so the king we made wouldn't look bad.

The present trouble, of course, stems from President Ngo Dinh Diem's treatment of the Buddhists.

A word about Buddhists: Recently these columns identified the Buddhists as a religious minority, while the news reports say that 70 per cent of the population is Buddhist. The World Almanac tells us Viet Nam's "Chief religion is Taoism, Buddhism is practiced; 10 per cent are Roman Catholics." And the Encyclopedia Britannica says that the "Religion is mainly ancestor-worship, influenced by Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism" and that "large numbers adhere to modern sects, for instance to Cao-Dai (a syncretism of Christianity and Buddhism) . . ." But if one accepts "Buddhism" as a generic term like "Christianity," Buddhists are not in the minority.

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But from all that Mr. Bigart tells us, the trouble is no more that of the Buddhists' making and of Diem than it is of Uncle Sam's.

Mr. Bigart says that Diem is a creature of American policy. True, there wasn't much to choose from for leader of the country when French power collapsed. But Diem was the candidate of the Central Intelligence Agency, though he was opposed by the then Ambassador J. Lawton Collins. Allen W. Dulles, then director

of the intelligence agency, persuaded his brother, John Foster Dulles, that the CIA candidate ought to be supported.

Thus the CIA took on the role of kingmaker and succeeded. But the king we made now has, through repression, created so much opposition and unrest that he must use armed forces against his own people.

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Nor is that all, if Mr. Bigart is correct in his backgrounding of the events that led to the disturbances in Viet Nam. For he plainly accuses the United States government of trying to manage the news to support Diem.

"Washington discouraged criticism that the Saigon government was repressive and that American aid had been wasted and mismanaged," Mr. Bigart writes.

But Washington now has opened its official eyes to what Washington has known for a long time has been going on there. It has publicly criticized the Diem regime, and in doing so it has opened the eyes of the American public, too, to what has been going on.

Not only to the "mismanagement and waste" of American aid that Mr. Bigart comments upon, but to a sad and cold fact of international intrigue that most Americans thought was practiced only by less democratic governments.

That is, when you make a king, you're stuck with him until you — or somebody else — gets rid of him for another. In this case, the "somebody else" may in the end be the Vietnamese people themselves. And the great danger is that they may turn to the Communist Viet Cong to do so.

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